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THE ART OF  
LETTER PAINTING  
MADE EASY



*THE ART OF*  
LETTER PAINTING  
MADE EASY

BY  
JAMES GREIG BADENOCH

*FOURTH EDITION*



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1888





# CONTENTS.

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	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY . . . . .	7
TO DRAW PLAIN BLOCK LETTERS . . . . .	10
PLATE I. . . . .	11
SIGN PAINTING . . . . .	16
PLATE II. . . . .	18
TO DRAW FULL BLOCK LETTERS . . . . .	23
PLATE III. . . . .	22
LETTERS THROWN BACK . . . . .	27
PLATE IV. . . . .	26
VARIOUS KINDS OF LETTERS . . . . .	28
PLATE V. . . . .	29
EXTENDED LETTERS . . . . .	33
PLATE VI. . . . .	32
SHADED LETTERS . . . . .	37
PLATE VII. . . . .	36
PLATE VIII. . . . .	39
PLATE IX. . . . .	43
PLATE X. . . . .	47

	PAGE
EXAMPLES OF LETTERS RUNNING INTO EACH OTHER .	51
PLATE XI. . . . .	50
FANCY LETTERS . . . . .	52
PLATE XII. . . . .	53
CIRCLE OR SCROLL WORK . . . . .	55
CONCLUDING REMARKS . . . . .	57

# LETTER PAINTING MADE EASY.

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## Introductory.

HAVING followed the business of letter painting, or sign writing, for many years, and having worked on a system which I believe to be entirely my own—or at any rate I have never known or heard of any one using it, or, in fact, any system except the “rule of thumb;” and it must be admitted that some men can, and do, turn out some most beautiful specimens of letter painting without any gauge or guide beyond the trained eye—I have been induced to make my system public.

However creditable the work just referred to may be to those who have done it, it is but poor encouragement to the beginner, for he has a long and difficult task before him, and forty-nine out of every fifty give it up in despair, for he has no guide but his eye. In the hope of being of some assistance to the beginner, and, it may be, a help to many men, good at other branches of the trade of house painting, I have made public the system on which I work; having no doubt but that, to any one willing to try, it will prove a safe and sure guide.

And I may as well say here that it is not intended that the system is to be always used. It is only meant that the student should learn by this how to make and form a well-shaped letter, to know and have some sure plan how to get spaces and distances, and to ascertain when his work is correctly done. Here he can learn a system which is mathematically correct and beyond all dispute;

having acquired which, and being able to do without drawing so many lines—and this will very soon be the case—he may then break through all rules and suit his own fancy. When once he has mastered this, he has mastered all, so far as letter making goes. Then, with the help of colours and good taste, there is nothing in sign painting he may not do. As regards gilding and colouring, I will say nothing; the first is, as far as the laying on goes, a mere mechanical art, and the other can only be effective when produced by taste and judgment.

### To Draw Plain Block Letters.

PLATE I. First, "snap" the line *a* on your black board, or draw it with a pencil on paper if more convenient; paper will be best for a while. Then draw the line *b*. Now whatever distance you may have between *a* and *b*, give twice that betwixt *b* and *c*; then *c* and *d* will be the same distance apart as *a* and *b*. Now you have got the length and thickness of your letter. Next divide the length of your line with your compasses by the same space as you have between *a* and *b*; having done that, roughly fill in the words "First Time," as you see it in the place at *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d*.

This being done, take a look at your work, and you will observe that F, R, S, T, all take up four spaces each; that is, three for the letter and one for a space between the letters. The two I's you will see take only two each; that is, one for the

**FIRST TIME**

*FIRST TIME*

---

2 4 4 2 4 3 2 4 2 4 3 2 = 36

**FIRST TIME**

3 f 4 4 2 4 4 3 2 4 4 2 4 3 3





letter itself and one for the division between the letters.

Second (*e* on Plate I.), roughly sketch the words "First Time" as you see it here. Two are for the space left at the beginning of your board, or show-card; 4 for F with its space; 2 for I with its space, and so on, until you come to the two T's, when you must allow two for the space between them. Then go on in the same way for the word TIME, and allow two spaces after, in all thirty-six spaces.

Third, draw *f* (Plate I.); first divide the length of your paper, or whatever space you are going to allow for your letters, into thirty-six divisions. Do it either with your compasses, or take your rule, and having found your length in inches, divide it by thirty-six, and if you find that you have fractional parts over give them to the spaces at the ends. Having found the space you can allow, mark off from the top of your sign the distance at both ends, draw your line, then below

that mark off and again draw your line, when you will have  $g$ ; then mark off two spaces, draw a line at that, then another off and draw, when you will have  $h$ ; now draw your perpendiculars.

Now miss two spaces and fill up the next three with the letter F, then miss one and fill in the letter I, and so on until you have written "First Time."

Having done all this, look at your work. What do you think of it? Are the letters what you would wish as to proportion—are they too thick or too thin, or what? The rule for making them is not a hard and fast one, but it is a rule that gives a very fair, proportionate letter; and when you have mastered the theory you can suit your own fancy. In the meantime you will be none the worse for sticking to this.

Before going any farther, take a look at the R, and see where it begins to curve; you will observe that every point of beginning and ending is indi-

cated by the square, either for the curve or straight line, length, or thickness.

Now look at the letter S, that bugbear of all beginners, as well as of a good many that think something of themselves; mark how it is done; did you ever see anything more simple? Why, when you drew your straight lines it was formed; and so were all the letters, as you will soon find out, if you have not done so already. Well, how do you like your work thus far? No doubt it is rather rough, but we will mend that by-and-by.

### Sign Painting

We will now suppose that the pupil has gone through the first steps with me, and that he sees his way clear so far. We will now begin to paint, say what—his own sign. I have not the pleasure of knowing his name, so I will call him Robert Burns, Painter. So Robert must measure the length of his sign-board, or if he has not got one, he must just imagine one the size he would like it to be when he turns “gaffer;” and he has my best wishes towards his success when he begins. In the meantime we will go at

#### ROBERT BURNS, PAINTER.

Robert, having got the size of his sign, will measure the length of it; and as “Robert Burns” is composed of letters of four spaces each, and as there are eleven letters, he will just have four times eleven, with two spaces to be left at the



ROBERT BURNS

PAINTEER.

beginning, three in the middle, or between the two words, and three at the end; that will be four times eleven  $= 44 + 2 + 3 + 3 = 52$  in all, the number of spaces into which his sign is divided. But as I have allowed four spaces for each letter, and as no letter follows the S, there can be no space between, so the last letter can only take three spaces, therefore there will be only fifty-one spaces. Begin operations as follows:—

PLATE II. Having divided the length of the sign by fifty-one, mark that space from the top of it—this is generally a safe rule to go by—snap your line, giving the same space for the thickness of the top of your letter; then mark off twice that for the body of the letter; now once again for the lower part, and you have the full length of your letter. Having done so, draw your perpendiculars with the help of a square—either a T or an ordinary square will do, or you may make one of cardboard, and by doubling up the edge you can slip

it along by your top or bottom moulding; that being done, begin by filling up your spaces with the letters, first doing the third space with what would form the letter I; now draw a curved line beginning with a straight from the near top corner of what is now your I, carrying it straight until you come to the top of the second space of your letter, then curve until you get the corner formed by the junction of your fourth perpendicular with your second horizontal lines. But you cannot do better than look at the plate; it is plain enough.

Having chalked in all your letters in the top line, begin on your second the word PAINTER. Here you can run your word into the whole length of the space, or you can leave spaces at each end so as to be more in the centre, as in the plate, where you have thirty-five divisions. Leave five spaces and commence chalking out, taking particular notice where your curves begin and end.





STANW

OSER

You will find that every point is indicated by the squares for curves, length, breadth, thickness, or angles, and by very little practice you will find them all with the greatest ease.

### . To Draw Full Block Letters.

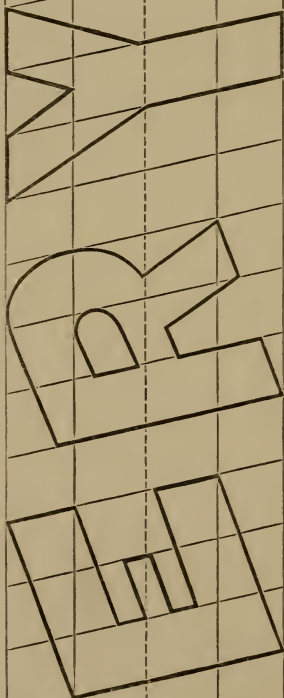
I will now try and show you how to construct full block letters. They are made in the same way as those you have already done, only one space more must be allowed between each letter, which space is equally divided betwixt the letters, to form what is called the block.

PLATE III. Here you have what may be called two kinds of letters. The first line is composed of what may be termed plain blocks, and is about the boldest and easiest to read that there is; and in fact there is no more effective letter that can be painted for reading at a great distance. You will observe the T, it takes three spaces; but

many like it better when it takes five, that is, one each for the drooping ends, and one between what may be called the pedestal and the drooping ends. Either way would be right ; five looks best where you are not tied for room.

The second line is almost the same, the only difference being that the blocks are square as in the first line. They are slightly curved at the angles—a very pretty yet bold letter if carefully done. I do not see that they need much description, as the plate explains itself clearly enough ; further on you will get to know about the shading points ; you will then be able to see what they are like when finished.





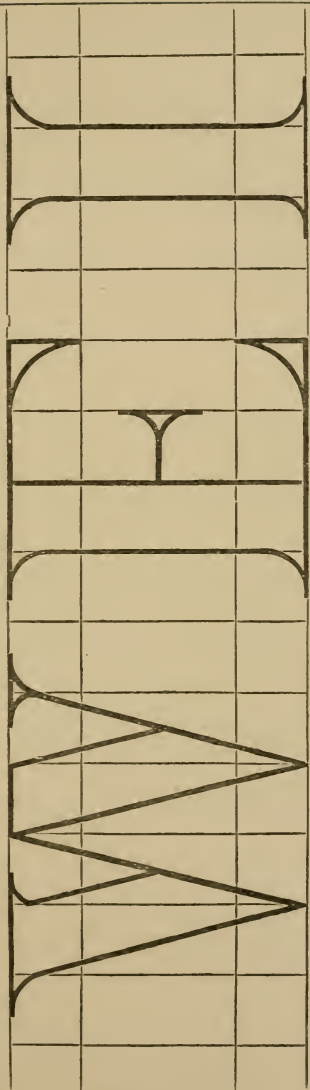
### Letters Thrown Back.

PLATE IV. shows the plain letter thrown back. It is done, as you will perceive, by throwing the lines forward at the bottom ; that is, by missing the first space at the bottom. By drawing a third or middle line the same distance from the second as the second is from the first, you get the starting-point for the “lay” of your letter. It is plainly shown in the plate. Of course they can as easily be thrown forward as backward, by simply reversing your lines. It is a letter that will be often found useful ; at any rate it is as well to know how to make them when required.

### Various Kinds of Letters.

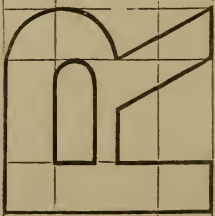
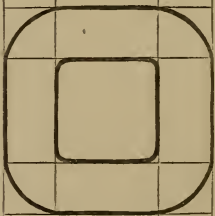
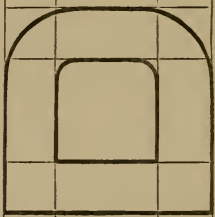
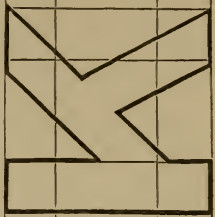
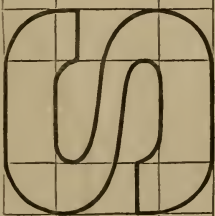
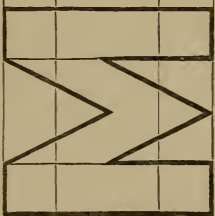
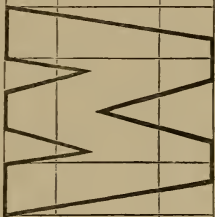
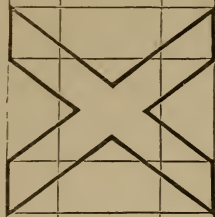
PLATE V. is produced from the same points as the other letters. By a very short study you will easily find where they begin and end ; in fact they are the easiest to do. You have merely to divide by the number of your letters, and if you keep them plumb you are right ; but you will be none the worse for practising them for a time by the system.











### Extended Letters.

PLATE VI. shows how to make extended letters. It is the same as the other, only leave two spaces for the centre as body of the letter. Another way is to divide your sign into as many spaces, then mark off the thickness for the two outsides of the letters.

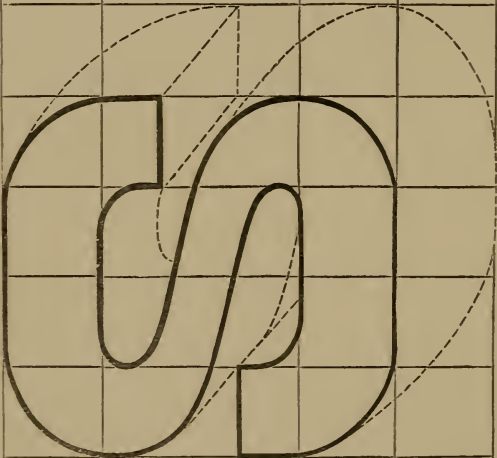
If you want a space between, you must of course allow for it, as it is easy to extend until you get out of all proportion. The thickness of the letter is simply a matter of taste.

Having now given you all the information required for the construction of what may be called the plain or unshaded letter, I will proceed to show you how to get the shading points. But before doing so I would here strongly recommend the pupil to try his hand at perspective, so that he may be able to "raise" the letters, in order to

make them look as if cut out of the solid. For this purpose he can do nothing better than to get "Davidson on House Painting,"\* in which there are lessons specially adapted to his wants, together with many hints that will be useful and profitable to him as a house painter. The lessons will be found to be easy to follow, as there are but few of them ; besides, they are so simple that they can be understood by any one, even should he be altogether unacquainted with perspective.

\* Published by Crosby Lockwood & Son.







## Shaded Letters.

PLATE VII. A shaded S. I have drawn S in preference to other letters, first because it is so difficult to make, and also because in many cases the shading is botched, even by good hands.

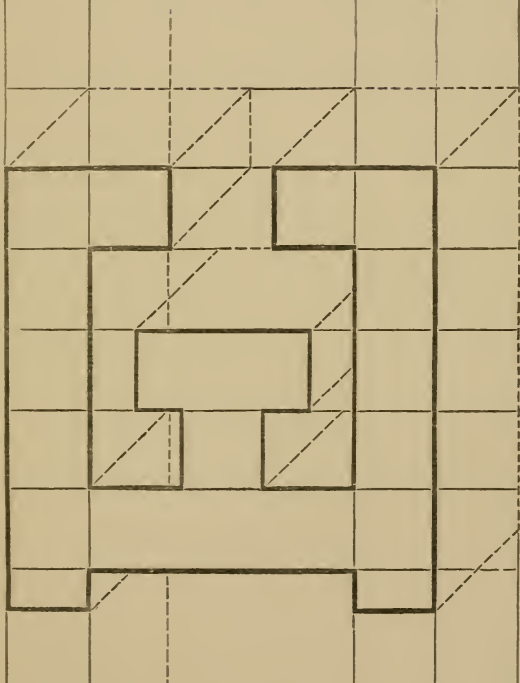
Now take a good look at it. Is it not far preferable to what you generally see as you go along the streets, such as the small one in the plate, which I submit is a fair sample as to shape of the ordinary S seen on most signs? It looks as if it were making an apology for its maker—as if it said, “I am ashamed of myself, but he could not make me any better.” Take the other made on this system; you cannot, I think, mend the turn of the ends nor get a bolder letter. It challenges the eye, and seems to say, “Look at me, beat me if you can.” The shading points are seen at a glance, and I do not see that I need describe them, as they are quite plain enough.

PLATE VIII. E. I have made these plates large, as I want the pupil to be able to see at a glance and to understand the points, shape, and style of the letters; and he will do that far better if he can get a decided view of them, than if I were to make them small and cramped, which might leave him in doubt.

Here you have what I take to be the nicest of the square letters. It does not need much description—it is as “plain as a pike-staff;” the shading points are easy to be seen. But with regard to the manner of colouring the shade, I think I had better leave that alone, simply remarking that two distinct shades of the same colour are necessary, and if properly selected, with a lighter colour for the strong lights, the effect will be—well, just as you make it.

Should you want a back shade, make it a darker shade of the ground colour if possible.

The letter here represented may not suit your

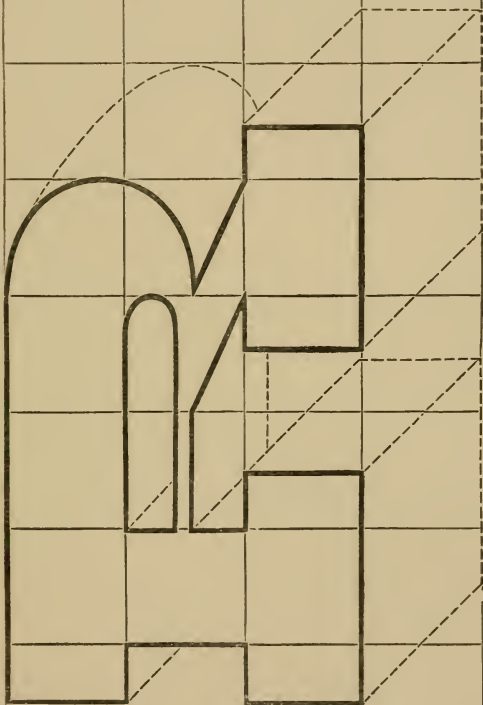




taste or idea of what you would like to see ; but you must remember that you are not to make your letters all your life by my model ; only learn how to make yours from mine, and, as I said before, get a style of your own. There is room enough and scope enough for you to become an artist ; for, believe me, there is a vast amount of skill and taste to be displayed in letter painting, and, what may be better still, there is money to be made by it, yea, and there is inside work in bad weather with less heavy labour to be undergone. Believe me, it is worth learning for very many reasons, the least of which I have stated here. You can always get a job, and a better wage. Think of these things and persevere.

PLATE IX. The next is the letter R. I have preferred to give you what is generally considered the worst to do, but really I cannot find that with the "system" one letter is worse to make than another. They are so plainly laid out by the squares that you might very well say they are all squares.

Here you have R extended, and thicker or more massive than the other; in fact, the variety is endless to which the system is applicable. I do not know of any letter but may be done by it, with a little thought. I have done all sorts, both old and new styles; but I seldom use it now. I just say 5 out of 20 (inches) or 12 out of 50 (feet or inches), as the case may be; having found the number that it will go, I place my compasses to my rule, dot it off on the sign, draw one straight



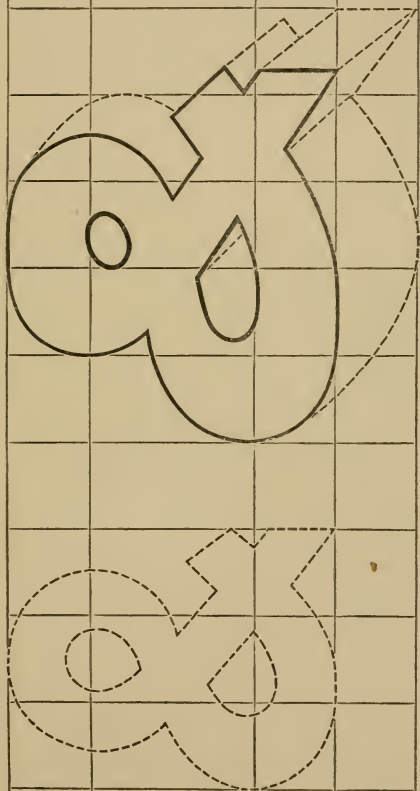




line to keep the letter plumb, take my brush, and off I go.

But if I meet with an S, and if a very particular job, I will draw the spaces for that letter, but not always. Only there is this in it—if you are up a ladder it saves your getting down to look at your work, and possibly having it to alter. With the system that is not necessary, as you cannot miss your mark. For shade and style, of course it is natural that you should want a “see” when you have finished; but all the seeing in the world will not alter the affair when you make it right to begin with, which the system does.

PLATE X. is universally proclaimed as a bad one. Well, try if you can do it. Here it is; look at it, the terror is gone. It is as simple as painting the back of a shutter, better pay, and not half such hard work. It is made by the same rule. There are two of them; make them, and there is nothing to hinder a dozen different sorts.







T A W L T U

3

3

3

3

6

3

3

3

W M A L S i

6

4

4

4

4

3

2

PLATE XI. Here you have a few examples to show the way the letters sometimes run into each other, so as to take up less room or fewer spaces, by observing which you may avoid mistakes when you come to actual practice. Take notice of the first two letters, T and A, A and V, and so on to the end of the line of eight letters ; while the under line has only seven letters, of the same size, but taking up the same space. But by a rough scratch or two with your pencil, as shown on Plate I., you can always tell to a nicety how many divisions you will want.

PLATE XII. is simply to show one or two ways by which the system may be made useful in making fancy letters without any extra trouble in the sketching. No doubt the pupil will soon be able to find innumerable ways and styles for himself.



A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z



### Circle or Scroll Work.

I may here mention that the system is equally applicable to circle or scroll work. You may find your spaces on either by simply dividing the circle or scroll by your dividers; or you may draw a straight line underneath, divide that, and carry it on to your circle or scroll by your straight-edge.

One way for making your letters proportionate in or on a circle is to divide the inner and outer edges of the circle separately; or you may do it by dividing the inner edge and putting in a centre point—a pin will do—and by keeping your straight edge to that, and bringing it to your division, drawing the line from edge to edge of the circle, your letter will be proportionate. As the outer edge is larger it occupies a greater space; it therefore follows that your letters should be rather thicker or heavier at the outer edge, and this plan gives the exact thing required, and makes, if well done,

a very pretty letter which looks well. And why it should not be well done I do not know, as the system if steadily followed will let it be nothing else than well done; only cut in the lines clean with your brush, and if you are not a good letter writer and painter in a month—then I say you have not tried as you ought to have done.

### Concluding Remarks.

In conclusion, I will just tell you that when I was not more than sixteen years old I was offered twenty-six shillings a week as sign painter. No one knew how I got at it, and I never told any one, but I will tell it now. I had work to do at which I had to sit very still; and in time, although it was work that was very fine, I got with practice that I could do it with my eyes shut and without thinking about it. That being the case I was sorely puzzled to keep myself awake. I had nothing at all to look at but a lot of show-bills, and I counted the letters on them until I was many a time sick of the job.

At last I counted the legs and spaces of the letters until I found out this system. I tried it, and found it to answer admirably. I did my spacing at home and made notes of my distances on slips of paper; and when I went to the shop the men

thought I must be a genius. I knew the ground I had to work on ; I spaced it at home, as I have said ; when I got to the shop I set my compasses to my rule, snapped my lines lengthways, and *never* made a mistake. If I did it was at home, and no one ever saw it ; so, like many another, I got credit for a genius I never possessed. Go ye and do likewise.

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
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
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


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
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
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
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
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